

The Future Of Retail CX Is Human

forbes.com/sites/denisejohn/2018/08/22/the-future-of-retail-cx-is-human

August 21, 2018

Aug 22, 2018, 05:32am

New technologies such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality and image recognition are disrupting the retail industry, and retailers want to use technology to win the customer experience (CX) battle. In the pursuit to leverage the potential of technology in CX, however, retailers must not lose sight of the humanity of CX.



The real potential of technology remains in the enhancing and advancing the human connection. Bruce Mars

The future of retail CX is human. Fundamentally CX has always been – and will always be -- designed by humans and delivered to humans. Technology can make CX better for humans (customers) and humans (employees) can use technology to create better CX, but the real potential of technology remains in the enhancing and advancing the human connection.

According to PwC, 75% of customers report that, as technology becomes more pervasive, they want more human interaction, not less. And yet 64% feel companies have lost touch with the human element of their interface with customers. So retailers must use new technologies to make CX even more human.

A more human experience is a more personal and emotional one. CX no longer has to be designed for the average customer – it can and should be designed for individuals. Most retailers have access to all the data and insights they need to create personalized shopping experiences. Their direct interactions with customers provide the means to generate a keen understanding of customers' wants and needs – this intelligence just needs to be collected and analyzed and then used in the CX design process.

Beauty retailer Sephora did just that when it developed its Color IQ solution. Because one of Sephora customers' biggest problems is knowing which makeup matches their skin tone, Sephora created the program wherein customers get their skin scanned and receive a personal reference number that they can use for selecting the right makeup.

By integrating customer, purchase, and content data, retailers can determine what situations and stimulus trigger certain behaviors, such as a purchase, for different shoppers. "Path-to-purchase" insights such as these are used by Randa Accessories, the world's largest men's accessories company, to align its marketing efforts to specific customers' preferences. In addition, Randa uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to uncover customer lifestyles and preferences, which in turn helps the company improve its product design, merchandising, and targeting -- all to make a more personal CX.

Technology can also be used to make CX more emotionally resonant. Reformation, a small brand of women's clothing stores, attracts a big fan base with a shopping experience that makes customers feel like rock stars. Their dressing rooms are equipped with "magic" wardrobes that have two sets of doors – one that the customer uses and the other that opens to the storeroom. If customers who are trying on their selections determine they would like a different size or other items altogether, they input their changes into a tablet device and the new items are placed into the wardrobe by employees working in the back of the house. Dressing rooms are also equipped with charging stations for mobile devices to encourage customers to show off their selections to friends, as well as lighting controls that can be adjusted to settings such as "golden" and "sexy time."

Emotional CX is not only created through in-store experiences. E-retailer eBags has introduced an element of fun and entertainment for customers shopping its selection on a mobile device. Inspired by the dating app Tinder, customers can swipe right or left on an image of a bag to indicate they consider it "hot" or not. The app incorporates an algorithm that analyzes over 100 variables to "learn" customers' likes and dislikes with each swipe and offer up new options based on the learning.

And Neiman Marcus uses image recognition and visual search technology in its "Snap. Find. Shop." mobile app feature. With it, customers can take a picture of a product they like in real life and the app will produce links to similar products in the store's inventory. It makes shopping more spontaneous and instantly gratifying.

More personal CX makes retailers more relevant and convenient and more emotional experiences prompt customers to trust and identify with a brand. By keeping their focus on the enduring power of the human connection, retailers can tap into the disruptive power of technology to win at CX.

Denise Lee Yohn is a brand leadership expert, speaker, and author of What Great Brands Do and FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies.